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USSR STRIVES FOR SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN TEA PRODUCTION

/Numbers in parentheses refer to appended sources./

Russia has traditionally imported tea. Parts of Georgian SSR and Azerbaydzhan SSR are the only localities in the USSR where soil-climate conditions are favorable for the development of tea cultivation. Since the end of 1945, tea cultivation has been progressively expanding in these areas under pressure from Soviet authorities.(1)

Georgian SSR

In the years 1900 - 1915 about 500 hectares were planted annually in tea in the vicinity of Chakva in Southwest Georgia by individual farmers. Successful harvests refuted the opinion of Tsarist agricultural officials that tea could not be grown in this area. The Soviet government encouraged the development and extension of tea cultivation in Georgia. In 1934 an effort was made to push the sowing of tea north to Sukhumi, Sochi, and Tuapse. Experiments have demonstrated that, while only the stronger plants will survive in the colder climate, tea bushes will grow at altitudes up to 500 meters above sea level. New varieties of winter-resistant tea were developed in the 1930's and all western Georgia is now a tea-producing region. However, the volume of production has not been sufficient to meet the national demand.

In 1948 the Academy of Sciences USSR established a joint expedition to study western Georgia for the possibility of further development of tea cultivation. The joint expedition included soil experts, geologists, agronomists, hydrologists, forestry specialists, and economists. It was discovered that further extension of the area under tea cultivation was hampered by groves of wild citrus trees. However, the expedition came to the conclusion that even without sacrifice of the citrus trees, tea cultivation could be increased 50-fold in the area. If this goal were achieved, it would mean an increase of 33 percent in the annual national tea-harvest totals. The joint expedition further recommended the development of a chain of hydroelectric stations in this area for the purpose of irrigating land under tea cultivation.(2)

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In 1929 the All-Union Scientific Research Institute for Tea and Sub-Tropical Crops established a branch office in Zugdinskiy Rayon for the further development of tea cultivation in the northern rayons of western Georgia. The Zugdinskiy branch has since promoted such scientific agricultural practices as the use of mineral and organic fertilizer compounds, irrigation in the dry months, and rapid harvesting of tea leaves to raise production levels. These efforts have been successful. The soil in this area is podzolic, and it was doubtful if tea could be raised here. However, record harvests of up to 12,000 to 15,000 kilograms of tea leaves per hectare have been obtained since the end of World War II. New frost-resistant varieties of tea have been developed.(3)

The total area of tea-growing farms in Georgia is now 123,000 acres.(4) Twelve new tea factories, processing a total of 40,000 tons of leaves annually, were recently built in the Georgian SSSR.(5) There are now 48 tea-processing factories in Georgia altogether. They processed 48 percent more tea in 1950 than in 1949.(6)

However, there are indications in the republic paper (?) of room for improvement in Georgian tea cultivation. On 15 December 1950, only 68.9 percent of the total Georgian tea plan for that year was fulfilled. Soil preparation and reworking quotas, and construction and repair of drainage canal networks, were behind schedule. The sovkhozes of the Georgian Tea Trust had fulfilled only 76.9 percent of their pledge plan on the same date. Harvest and preparation of tea seeds were likewise behind schedule in the Samtredskiy, Tsalendzhikhskiy, and Chiaturskiy rayons. Phosphorous fertilizer had not been utilized on some kolkhozes, and others had ploughed the soil to a depth of only 20 centimeters instead of the usual 45 centimeters in the Lanchkhutskiy, Tsulukidzevskiy, Terzhol'skiy, and Abashskiy rayons. The 1 May Kolkhoz in Samtredskiy Rayon failed to practice contour ploughing. Still other kolhozes did not use harrows, did not properly clear the land before planting, did not repair drainage ditches, did not fence in tea fields, and failed to call for fertilizer at the Tekhkul'tsnab warehouse (the central Georgian supply warehouse). These malpractices occurred in the Batumskiy, Kobuletskiy, Lanchkhutskiy, Makharadzevskiy, Chokhataurskiy, Tsulukidzevskiy, Zugdinskiy, Tsalendzhikhskiy, Gerechkorskiy, Khobskiy, and Gal'skiy rayons.(7)

To correct these failures, the Council of Ministers of the Georgian SSR, and the TsK KP(b) of Georgia have decreed that:

1. The Councils of Ministers of the Abkhaz ASSR and of Adzhar ASSR, rayon executive committes, oblast committees in the Georgian tea rayons, and the "Chaysovkhoz" Trust will:

a. Organize mass field work on the sovkhozes and kolkhozes for the fall and winter, set tasks, and guarantee fulfillment. Direct special attention to the reworking of land planted with tea, and to the proper and timely utilization of fertilizer.

b. Complete in the near future the working of land to be planted in tea for the first time.

c. Organize procurement of phosphorous and other mineral fertilizers from Tekhkul'tsnab, utilizing the facilities of Tekhkul'ttrans.

d. Guarantee cleaning and repair of drainage networks.

e. Guarantee installation of shelter belts and other fences to protect tea fields.

f. Provide for the fulfillment by 1 January 1951 of seed collection and storing quotas.

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2. The secretaries of the Samtredskiy, Abashskiy, and Terzhol'skiy Rayon committees will act at once to halt malpractices, and hold those responsible to strict account.

3. The Ministry of Industrial Crops of the Georgian SSR, rayon executive committees, and rayon committees will closely supervise the course of winter work on the tea plantations, and take all necessary measures to prevent further malpractices.(7)

Azerbaydzhan SSR

The VKP(b) and the government issued a decree dated 29 May 1948 concerning the development of tea cultivation in southwest Ukraine, Moldavia, Crimea, Central Asia, the Primorskiy Kray, Northern Osetia, Dagestan, and Krasnodarskiy Kray. Research is now being carried out in all of these areas. At present, conditions appear most favorable in the Azerbaydzhan SSR. A governmental decree dated 7 May 1949 ordered the development of tea cultivation as the chief crop there.(8)

The cultivation of tea in the Lenkoranskiy and Zakatal'skiy rayons of the Azerbaydzhan SSR began in 1932. Up to now 98 percent of all tea grown in this area has been produced in the Lenkoranskiy Rayon. The climate in general is favorable, but rainfall is very unevenly distributed throughout the year.(9) Nonetheless, the area planted in tea has been continuously extended. The Azsovkhozchay Trust's subtropical sovkhozes planted 100 additional hectares of tea in the fall of 1950.(10) Isolated strips of usable land on the coastal marshes of the Lendoranskiy depression were utilized for the first time after reclamation. Throughout the Azerbaydzhan SSR the area planted in tea in 1950 was four times that of 1949.(11)

An intensive campaign is under way to make Azerbaydzhan a second basic tea-growing area with an output volume equal to that of Georgia. The assistance of the Academy of Sciences USSR and the Academy of Sciences Azerbaydzhan SSR have been enlisted in this effort. Scientific agricultural practices must be applied to counteract the effect of uneven precipitation. The tea bush must have a continuous supply of moisture, but it cannot stand either too much or too little. In Azerbaydzhan the total annual precipitation is adequate, but it occurs almost entirely during the fall and winter. Summers are dry. The tea bushes must be protected from both climatic extremes. The main problem is to regulate the water content of the soil, and, if necessary, to modify climatic conditions through irrigation, shelter belts, and reclamation. The Azerbaydzhan Institute of Perennial Crops and the Azerbaydzhan Institute of Hydraulic Engineering and Reclamation have been exhausted to increase scientific research in these directions.(12)

The Joint Expedition for the Development of Tea Culture, created by the above-mentioned decree, dated 29 May 1948, met with representatives of the Academy of Sciences Azerbaydzhan SSR in December 1950. The sessions, which lasted from 25 to 28 December, were presided over by B. B. Polynov, and attended by the staffs of the Azerbaydzhan Botanical Institute, the Azerbaydzhan Agronomy and Soil Science Institute, the Azerbaydzhan Institute of Perennial Crops, and various agricultural specialists and Kolkhoz representatives.(13)

Reports were read dealing with the increase in the amount of land under tea cultivation, the increase in yield of the tea bush, research in seed selection, development of a seed base, cultivation of rice adjacent to tea fields for the purpose of absorbing excessive amounts of ground water, proper irrigation techniques, etc.(8)

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Future plans for the further development of tea cultivation in Azerbaydzhan were discussed. The plan is for 50,000 acres to be under tea by 1961. Mechanization and electrification of the sovkhozes is planned, along with the planting of shelter belts and a program of road construction.(8)

A study of the Azerbaydzhan climate will be made this year (1951) to discover how it may be altered to benefit tea production. A map of the soil cover of the Lenkoranskiy, Masallinskiy, Zakatal'skiy, Kakhskiy, and Belokanskiy rayons will be made. A study will also be made of 63,000 hectares of timbered land to see if portions of it could be utilized for tea cultivation. A soil improvement and erosion control program is under way. The use of artificial rain machines is being studied. The varieties of tea best suited to this region must be found, and new varieties with high resistance characteristics must be discovered. This data will be collected by the Academy of Sciences Azerbaydzhan SSR by 1 April 1951. It will be correlated and evaluated by the Economic Institute of the Academy of Sciences USSR. The resulting plan of action will be implemented by the Joint Expedition for the Development of Tea Culture in the period 1951 - 1952.(12)

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